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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9787
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4807
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2895
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2944
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2101
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2357
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5293
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1164
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1193
RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH 1033
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2876
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001541

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: KEY PARTY IN GOVERNING COALITION TRIES TO STOP THE
BLEEDING

REF: JAKARTA 1517 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Golkar party, the largest in Parliament and a key member of the President Yudhoyono's governing coalition, has announced internal changes in the way it does business. The changes--focused on who will represent Golkar in Parliament after the 2009 elections--are meant to make the process more democratic. It is not clear whether the changes will calm down elements of the party worried about its failure in recent elections. Under pressure from opposition and Islamic-oriented parties, Golkar needs to get its house in order before the April 2009 parliamentary elections. END SUMMARY.

GOLKAR MAKES CHANGES

12. (C) Golkar--a major political party in Indonesia--has announced some key changes. Party representatives stated on August 12 that the party--in a complicated process--would allocate Golkar seats in Parliament based on how many votes a candidate receives in the upcoming parliamentary elections. In the past, the party leadership had basically distributed Golkar's seats to candidates of its choosing. Vice President Jusuf Kalla, who also serves as Golkar party chair, approved the changes. The changes were announced as Indonesia's political parties scramble to submit their lists of candidates to the national election commission for the parliamentary election, which is scheduled for April 2009.

13. (C) Golkar's changes are meant to make the whole process more democratic. In the past, the Golkar leadership used its ability to select who got into Parliament to favor those candidates who were considered firm loyalists. Sometimes Golkar candidates, who were quite popular and proven vote-winners, were basically shunted aside in favor of party hacks who were tapped by the leadership to serve in Parliament.

REACTING TO A WAVE OF CRITICISM

14. (C) The move was clearly meant to help stem the tide of

problems that Golkar is facing. As reported in reftels, the party has fared poorly in recent gubernatorial elections, winning none of them. Moreover, the party is not doing well in the much-watched world of opinion polling, often falling behind the Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P) while not showing the momentum of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). (Note: The re-energized, secular-oriented PDI-P, led by former President Megawati, is the key opposition party to President Yudhoyono. The PKS, which is Islamic-oriented, has done well in recent elections. It is doing well in the national polls, but is not close to PDIP's or Golkar's level of popularity at this time.)

15. (C) Theo Sambuaga, a senior Golkar MP and head of Parliament's foreign affairs committee, told Pol/C on August 12 that he hoped the changes would convince members of the party that Golkar stood for "democratic reform and was not retrograde." Sambuaga went on to note that "the party is under a lot of pressure from members who are worried that the party's leadership is out of touch and this new plan should help restore confidence." Sambuaga added that Golkar plans to emphasize the need for "change" and "new directions" as it tries to appeal to younger voters. Reacting to the changes, one member of Golkar was quoted as stating: "Golkar must change as we have conceded defeats in a series of gubernatorial elections. We hope the new policy can reverse these trends."

TRYING TO GET ITS HOUSE IN ORDER

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16. (C) Under pressure from both opposition (read PDI-P) and Islamic-oriented parties (like PKS), Golkar needs to get its house in order before the April 2009 parliamentary elections. This move regarding candidates may help it to some extent. That said, Vice President Kalla is not particularly popular as a leader, and the party has to do more to appear less hidebound and more energetic in a country in which there is a considerable youth bulge. The party has time given that the elections are months away. It also is said to have substantial financial resources.
HUME